

Themes Of Pre-Raphaelite Orientalism: Religion, Exoticism, And Textiles In The
Orientalist Discourse

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A thesis submitted to the School of Art, Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master Of Arts

in Art History

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University of Houston
May 2021

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DEDICATION

To my parents, I could never have done this without you raising me to love reading, the arts, and questioning what I see. Mom, for reminding me how proud Dad would have been and for you never giving up hope on me while accepting I do things the hard way. Also, to my best friend and sweetheart Mark, thank you for always believing in me. Last, I have not forgotten Piper. Sweetpea, this is a reminder to believe you can do what you set your sights on and more.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to start by thanking all my professors at the University of Houston. I have been inspired and learned so much during my undergraduate and graduate work with you. Dr. Rodney Nevitt, Dr. Rex Koontz, and Dr. Leopoldine Prosperetti, I would not have produced the thesis I am presenting without all of you challenging me.

Dr. Nevitt allowed me the freedom to realize what I wanted to explore in my research. I am thankful for a mentor who did not pigeonhole me in my topic. Dr. Koontz for reminders that drafts are called rough for a reason, and Dr. Prosperetti unknowingly helping me find my niche when I was her student in undergraduate courses. I would also like to thank Dr. Nisa Ari for bringing an Orientalism class to the department. I thought I knew what I wanted to do for my thesis, and you gave me an unfamiliar perspective to explore.

A huge thanks to the librarians at the William R. Jenkins Architecture, Design, and Art Library and the Hirsch Library. Without the fantastic librarians' help getting materials for me and being patient when I rooted through the archives, I could not have completed my project.

I am grateful to my friends and family who have supported my tirades and inner monologues throughout this process. I know it often sounded like me prattling on about nothing special, but it has come to fruition. Thank you to my classmates Ana and Cammie. I am so fortunate to have had you as my friends and sounding board throughout this program. Both of you helped me keep my sanity while researching and writing during these Covid days. Chesli and Lindsey, you both are so talented and will be so successful wherever life takes you.

ABSTRACT

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood often recalls the fantastic, medieval themes used by the artists or a dialogue of their personal lives. This thesis aims to allow the reevaluation of William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Morris through the lens of Orientalism. Using the definitions of Orientalism by Edward Said and later Linda Nochlin, three works, one by each artist, will be broken down into elements that exhibit different Orientalist elements used by the artists. These elements will focus on themes of religion, exoticism, and Islamic textile work. Each artist takes a different path in their art by participating in the discourse in an overt, latent, or appreciation of Eastern art methods.

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CHAPTER 1

Si, Je Puis. If I Can.¹

When starting this journey for my thesis, I stumbled across the idea of reevaluating the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood through the lens of Orientalism. My goal was to move away from the often-stated facts about the Brotherhood and bring together new or less-discussed subject matter. I started my work on William Holman Hunt and found very little concerning him in the context of being an Orientalist, and most of what I found was written in the 1970s by the scholar George Landow. These papers were illuminating, but I was disappointed there was not more to be found. As I progressed and continued my search, I found Eleanora Sasso's book *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Though her focus centered on the literature of the Pre-Raphaelites, she did cover some of the artwork. I found inspiration that I was not on an utterly untrodden path.

The first question I had to decide on was how to approach this subject. Would I limit my focus to William Holman Hunt, or would I incorporate the work of other members of the Brotherhood? I decided to work with three members whose work interested me but also varied from each other. I chose William Holman Hunt because of his travels to the Middle East and his interest in incorporating realism into religious works. Dante Gabriel Rossetti added himself to the list because of his use of fantasy and

¹ This is the motto used by Morris in different parts of Red House. The moment I read the phrase it resonated as a description of this work. The phrase is adopted from Jan Van Eyck's *Als Ich Kan* (As Best I Can). Wild, Tessa. 2018. *William Morris and His Palace of Art: Architecture, Interiors and Design at Red House*. Bloomsbury USA. 7.

how it translated into his poetry and art. Last I chose William Morris, who worked from the space of designer, not a painter but still showed the world's influences in his art.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was formed in 1848 by John Edward Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, all students at the Royal Academy of Art. Later joining were James Collinson, William Michael Rossetti, Thomas Woolner, and Frederic George Stephens in the initial formation.² During this time, most of Europe was in turmoil with uprisings and revolutions, and these artists decided the British art world needed a revolt as well. The Brotherhood did not last but a few years, but they created a new dynamic in art and how to view the world. The members often disagreed, but all believed that art had become stagnant since the Renaissance, especially after Raphael's work. They knew something had to change.³

Inspired by John Ruskin's writings and the works before Raphael, the Brotherhood decided to use the initials P.R.B. on their artworks but not tell anyone what it meant. According to Hunt, they wanted to have some secrecy because they did not want to offend "the reigning powers of the time."⁴ They all approached this new concept of art differently but relied on several points gained from Ruskin's *Modern Painters*: "[to] go to nature in all singleness of heart ... rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth."⁵ Using Ruskin's thoughts on art and wanting to correct what they deemed a

² Rossetti, William Michael, and William R. Fredeman. 1975. *The P.R.B. Journal: William Michael Rossetti's Diary of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, 1849-1853, Together with Other Pre-Raphaelite Documents*. Clarendon Press. 4.

³ Wood, Christopher. 2000. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Seven Dials. 9-10.

⁴ Hunt wrote his musings and memories many years after the actual occurrences. There are arguments to the validity and accuracy of the events. Hunt, William Holman. 1905. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Macmillan. 98

⁵ Ruskin, John. 1857. *Modern Painters*. Smith, Elder, and Company. 415.

decline in European painting, the P.R.B. aimed to revive a “purity” they felt earlier artists understood. The Brotherhood saw examples daily when attending classes at the Royal Academy admiring newly acquired works such as Jan Van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait*.⁶

As the members matured and moved on with their careers, new “brothers” came to join the now-former Brotherhood. In the second wave of the Pre-Raphaelites, Rossetti welcomed Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris.⁷ Burne-Jones and Morris were classmates at Oxford who had changed their plans of becoming clergy to study art. The two found a kinship quickly, which lasted the rest of their lives. Ned and Topsy, as they called each other, both found enchantment with the medieval period and wanted to bring aspects back to contemporary art. Introduced to Pre-Raphaelitism through the writings of John Ruskin, they found other like-minded individuals in the works of Rossetti and the others. In 1855, Burne-Jones attended the Working Men’s College and became the pupil of Rossetti. This project became the starting point of the collaborative work between the three men.⁸

In 1857, the Oxford Mural Project brought the three to work together with several other emerging artists. The younger men looked to Rossetti as their leader and inspiration. The men were in awe of him, according to one of the painters, Val Prinsep. He notes that the men copied Rossetti’s way of speaking and using terms such as “stunners” for women they found beautiful. The mural project consisted of ten scenes

⁶ Smith, Alison, Caroline Bugler, Susan Foister, and Anna Koopstra. 2017. *Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites*. National Gallery Company. 30-32.

⁷ Wood, Christopher. 2000. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Seven Dials. 109.

⁸ Ibid., 109.

from the *Morte d'Arthur*, allowing the men to work in the Medieval style they had started to adopt.⁹

The interest of the Middle East came to William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Morris at different points in their careers. There does not appear to be one single moment they all grabbed onto this interest. Most likely, Hunt developed the interest first because he traveled to the East in 1853, four years before the Oxford Mural Project. Hunt's reasoning lay true to the original conception of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood ideals of truth in art. The planning of this trip and when he left England took place several years after the first idea of going to Jerusalem came to him.

Rossetti's interest in the Middle East is harder to pin down. He was interested in the curiosities from around the world for many years, which included exotic animals. During his marriage to Elizabeth Siddal and after her death, there was a fascination with the works of Dante. However, in writing from both Michael and Christina Rossetti, they both mention his love of *Arabian Nights* as a youth.¹⁰ He had made sketches over the years of his depictions of the stories from *Arabian Nights* but never did much with them.

Once William Morris decided to become involved in art, he devoured books and information concerning different techniques. He mentions in his letters seeing objects from the East (primarily textiles) that fascinated him with the use of color and artistry. Morris often experimented with different materials, colors, and styles. Also, as he learned more concerning the Medieval period and the processes involved in textile work, he branched out into incorporating different techniques and styles into his designs.

⁹ Wood, Christopher. 2000. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Seven Dials. 109-110.

¹⁰ Sasso, Eleonora. 2019. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Edinburgh University Press. 12.

When Orientalism comes up in conversations concerning nineteenth-century art, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is not often a focus. Out of the three, William Holman Hunt becomes part of the conversation commonly, but he follows a lot of the same patterns of other commonly known Orientalists by traveling to the Middle East and creating paintings of the land, people, and architecture. A nuanced examination of the art of Rossetti and Morris can also put them into the same conversation but in a broader approach to the subject.

Edward Said himself did not explicitly address how visual art might fit into a concept of Orientalism. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly possible for us to extrapolate. According to Said, in *Orientalism*, three primary factors present themselves: distribution, elaboration, and intention. The person acting within an Orientalist discourse does not act passively, but with forethought, the action might not have any intention of harming but often shows imperialistic tendencies.¹¹ Said explains his theory as follows:

... the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.¹²

For Said, the West's treatment of the East and the contrast between these parts of the world still create an Orientalist discourse. Rossetti, like Hunt, acquired particular mythology of the East at a young age by reading the *Arabian Nights*.¹³

¹¹ Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ Sasso, Eleonora. 2019. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Edinburgh University Press. 12.

In response to Said's book, the art historian Linda Nochlin in 1982 wrote an essay titled "The Imaginary Orient," which brought to bear Said's notion of Orientalism on the understanding of visual art. In particular, Nochlin questioned aspects of the 1982 exhibition and accompanying catalog *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting, 1800-1880*.¹⁴ Her concern arose because after seeing this "fresh look" at French painters of the nineteenth century ostensibly through the lens of "Orientalism." Nochlin was dissatisfied, the organizer's forthright declaration that the exhibition would avoid any discussion or reevaluation of the works of art from the standpoint of critical concepts of imperialism or colonialism theory. As Nochlin eloquently stated, the exhibit would be "art-historical business as usual," not a way to move forward and look at famous works of art differently.¹⁵ Although many years have passed since the exhibit that spurred Nochlin's essay, a reexamination of some of the issues involved will allow a better understanding of the artists' outlook and allow current and future generations to improve and break the business-as-usual model. Using these concepts concerning Rossetti's art and poetry allows a deeper understanding of the man and his work. Also, bringing previously excluded artists into the discourse educates people of diverse levels concerning Orientalist traits.

Since Nochlin makes a good argument of reevaluating art and the process needed, the continual appearance and understanding of "Orientalist tropes" is required. Nochlin, in her response, breaks down certain aspects that repeatedly appear in the art that she considers Orientalist. First, one notices an absence of a clearly represented historical time in the paintings. Popular Orientalist painters of the time such as Eugène Delacroix and

¹⁴ Nochlin, Linda. 2018. *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art And Society*. Routledge. 33.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

Jean-Léon Gérôme have paintings where the viewer cannot place when the action of the painting takes place; the action could occur in the early second century or the contemporary world. Many artists, especially in the nineteenth century, thought the East had not progressed in time but was stuck in a period closer to the second to the tenth century. Even when traveling, they expected to see people and buildings with more of the ambiance of the ancient world than their European counterparts.¹⁶ This odd understanding of time helped to increase the European misunderstanding of the East. A second aspect involves the concept of the Western gaze. Even when not visible, the white, European male makes his presence known to the others in the painting and the viewer. The better-known artists in the genre used what could appear as a heightened level of detail to create a scene that appeared scientific and authentic to the viewer. This visual approach allows the artist to present a scene where the viewer pictures himself or herself as intimately involved in the scene because of the hyper-realistic touches. Finally, a sense of idleness becomes apparent. The people in the paintings do not show signs of industry. Instead, they sit, recline, play instruments, eat, pray, or drink. These details help explain why the East's people and buildings appear backward and reverse of life in the West to the European viewer. Additionally, this adds another layer to the East versus West mentality or the labeling of the East as "other."¹⁷

¹⁶ Nochlin, Linda. 2018. *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art And Society*. Routledge. 34-48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 33-39.

CHAPTER 2

William Holman Hunt: A Pre-Raphaelite In the East

In nineteenth-century Europe, artwork and literature of the period demonstrated an increasing interest in the Middle East. For artists in Victorian England, this curiosity grew from the effects of British colonialization in the Middle East and a growing interest in what was perceived as Oriental exoticism. William Holman Hunt, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, came to see the East as a vessel through which he could refine and enhance the symbolism of his religious art.¹⁸ What better way to achieve a more intense realism in his work than to go to the place of Jesus' birth to record the people and the land? The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's ideals and Hunt's newfound religious fervor allowed him to change how his audience understood religion and symbolism in the context of Orientalist discourse.

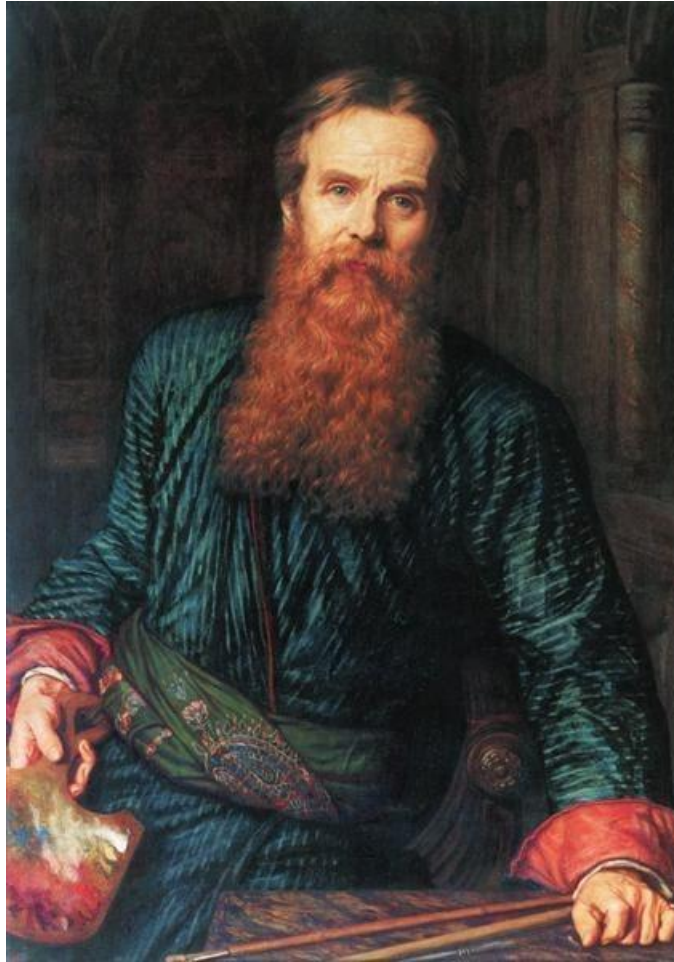
Did Hunt intend to enter the Orientalist discourse under the terms Said set up over a century later? A self-proclaimed Orientalist, Hunt referred to his enthrallment with the Orient as his "Oriental-mania."¹⁹ He saw himself as an adventurer, pilgrim, ethnographer, and artist while loving his travels despite difficulties on his multiple trips. Although he enjoyed the romance of the *Arabian Nights* stories, he also wanted to document and bring this part of the world to England and beyond.²⁰ His *Self-Portrait* [Figure 2.1] from 1875

¹⁸ Landow, George P. 1983. *William Holman Hunt's Letters to Thomas Seddon*. The John Rylands University Library of Manchester. 139-147.

¹⁹ Landow, George P. "William Holman Hunt's 'Oriental Mania' and His Uffizi Self-portrait." *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1982). 648.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 648.

Figure 2.1 Hunt, William Holman, *Self-Portrait*, 1875, oil on canvas, Galleria Degli Uffizi/ArtStor Images

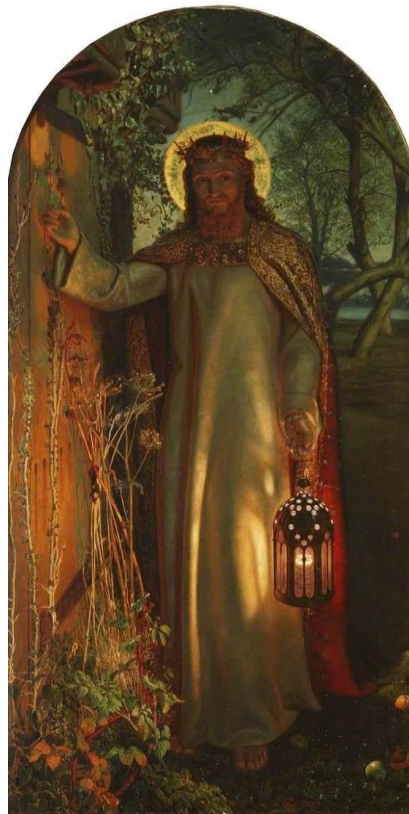


shows him dressed in clothes from the Orient while holding a painter's palette in his hand and mahlsticks lying on the table. He wanted to highlight how he saw himself in his Orientalizing discourse in distinct roles, and despite his travels, he still held on in some ways to the romantic lens of the *Arabian Nights*. Upon his initial travels to the Middle East, a photographer captured him wearing his Arab robes with his European clothing visible underneath. He wanted to enjoy and live the best of both worlds.²¹

²¹ Landow, George P. "William Holman Hunt's "Oriental Mania" and His Uffizi Self-portrait." *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1982). 648-649.

Despite baptism at birth as an Anglican, Hunt had long considered himself an Atheist. In 1851, however, Hunt converted and became devoutly religious.²² He started to receive more religious-themed commissions and wanted to bring greater realism to the work he painted with these themes. In his painting, *The Light of the World*, 1851-53, Hunt painted Christ knocking on a door while holding a lantern [Figure 2.2].

Figure 2.2 Hunt, William Holman, *The Light of the World*, oil painting, 1851-53, Keble College, Oxford, UK./Bridgeman Images



In his view, Hunt became displeased with the work because of his overly conventional European symbols to depict Christ, such as the haloed Christ in his white robes, carrying

²² There is some disagreement between scholars as to which religious group Hunt felt he belonged to after his conversion. Overall, he is thought to be Evangelical. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and Timothy Barringer. 2018. *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*. 45.

the light he brings to the world while knocking on the door leading to the human soul. Any well-versed nineteenth-century Christian in Europe would understand the meaning of the painting, but Hunt became disappointed using such European tropes and began to feel that the painting did not meet his expectations of the premises of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.²³

Hunt was determined to work out a new approach to religious art and decided to travel to the Middle East. He felt this trip would expose him to the reality of Christ and allow him to paint in the most realistic of ways. Although he brought his Victorian preconceptions and stereotypes with him on his trip, he also wanted to relocate himself and felt that the trip would amount to a journey back in time.²⁴ In the book *Pre-Raphaelitism and The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, Hunt recalls a discussion with Dante Gabriel Rossetti concerning travel to bring authenticity to their art. “My contention was that more exact truth was distinctly called for by the additional knowledge and longings of the modern mind, and that it was not outside the lines of the noblest art.”²⁵ According to letters exchanged with the artist Thomas Seddon, who accompanied Hunt on his trip to Jerusalem in 1853, Hunt considered himself the teacher and Seddon, the student. He respected Seddon’s determination to travel abroad to bring realism to his work, so the two had this in common. The letters from Hunt are enlightening in that they show how he wanted the trip to be successful, the current commissions that he was completing, and the ideas about painting that he wanted to impart to Seddon.²⁶

²³ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and Timothy Barringer. 2018. *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*. 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁵ Hunt, William Holman. 1905. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Macmillan. 105.

²⁶ Landow, George P. 1983. *William Holman Hunt’s Letters to Thomas Seddon*. The John Rylands University Library of Manchester. 139-147.

An interesting episode in the letters occurs when Seddon returns to England earlier than planned. Hunt forthrightly tells the younger painter to delay his return to complete a work in progress. Seddon explains he must go, and he will complete the work later and use his memory and notes to complete the work. Hunt chides the artist and tells him a painter painting from life must complete the work in situ, as memory does not serve people well. This criticism becomes an interesting commentary that Hunt himself addresses later this same trip.²⁷

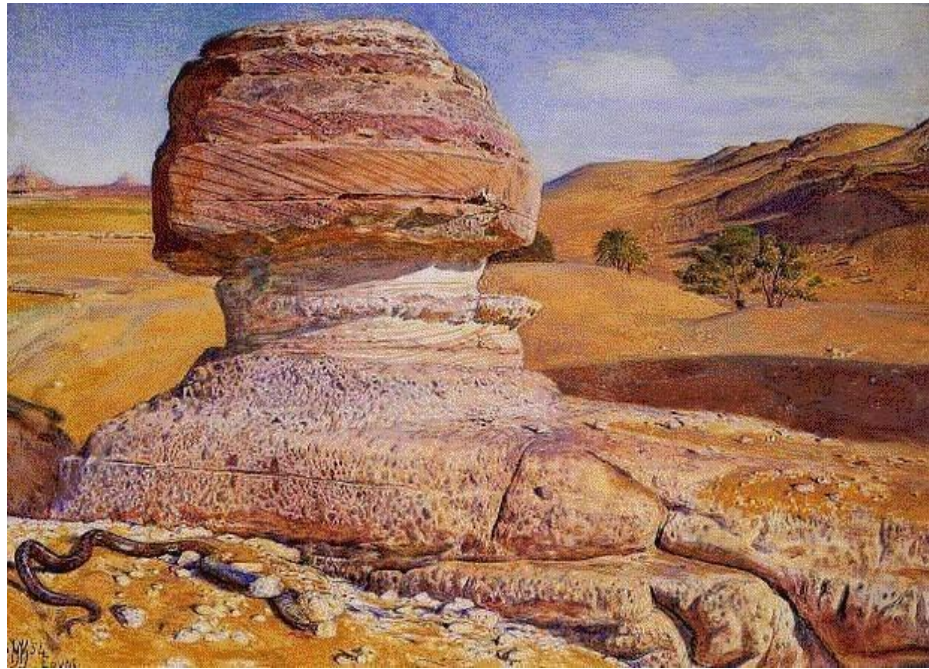
Following in the footsteps of fellow British artist David Wilkie, Hunt left for Jerusalem with the intent to remake religious art for a modern Protestant audience, painting with “absolute truth” in art.²⁸ In 1854, while mapping out the land, Hunt started a watercolor of Giza’s Great Sphinx. He took great care in making measurements of the monument and orienting himself with the surrounding land. His painting, *The Sphinx at Gizeh* [Figure 2.3], changes the angle most are familiar with seeing the Sphinx. Hunt faces towards the pyramids of Saqqara, giving a view from behind the Sphinx. The great monument is visibly crumbling in the painting, the stone becoming sand as it returns to the Earth.²⁹ Using this unique perspective, Hunt tests his new environments.

²⁷ Ibid., 139-147.

²⁸ Tromans, Nicholas. 2008. *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting*. Yale University Press. 10.

²⁹ Ibid., 104.

Figure 2.3 Hunt, William Holman, *The Sphinx at Gizeh*, 1854 (w/c and gouache), / Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, Lancashire, U.K. / Bridgeman Image



In *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, from 1854-55 [Figure 2.4], Hunt applies his newly acquired knowledge of the East to his distinctive painting style. Currently, on display at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the painting measures 85.7 x 141 cm without its ornate frame.³⁰ The painting depicts the episode from the Gospel of Luke (2:45-51) in which Jesus' parents find him in the temple after discovering him missing from the caravan while returning to Nazareth. On a white background in gold calligraphy, the innermost section of the frame displays the following verse:

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem,
seeking him. And after three days, they found him in the Temple.
And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said
unto him, Son, why hast thou dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I

³⁰ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and Timothy Barringer. 2018. *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*. 132.

have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And he went down with them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.³¹

Figure 2.4 Hunt, William Holman, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, oil painting, 1854-55, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham, England.



The wooden outer section of the gold-painted frame has elaborate decorations. Hunt uses these decorations containing symbolic meanings as an introduction to the painting. The left side of the frame is a snake wound around a cross, the snake and cross a reference to the Old Testament and Moses concerning healing power and foreshadowing the

³¹ Birmingham Museums Trust | Image Details - The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple.”

Crucifixion, while on the right side of the frame is a cross composed of flowers and thorns standing for Jesus Christ and the New Testament. The top of the frame echoes the contrast between the old and the new. The sun and an eclipsed moon lay in the center, with stars leading to the corners. The sun represents the new light we should follow, which replaces the light of the moon. The bottom of the frame holds pansies and daisies scrolled across as symbols of peace and humility.³² Drawing the viewers in with the ornate frame, Hunt wanted the viewer to understand the importance and sacredness of the event he paints.

The painting inside this frame is quite complicated and full of action with additional symbolism. The painting depicts a Jewish temple with elders on the left side and Jesus with his parents Mary and Joseph, on the right. The temple opens to the outside, while pillars brace the ceiling. The ornamentation on the gold-toned pillars is a vine pattern that wraps up and down the sturdy posts. On the right side, the temple opens to the street. The floor bears a worn, red Persian-style carpet. On the temple's back wall hangs an Islamic-style screen letting in the sunlight but giving privacy to those in the temple. The scrolling decorations between the ceiling and the tops of the beams allow lamps to hang periodically. Next to the doorway on the right hangs a large circular emblem. Words around the upper edge of the emblem written in Hebrew and Latin contain a phrase from Malachi 3.1: "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his Temple."³³

³² Birmingham Museums Trust | Image Details - The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple."

³³ Landow, George P. 1979. *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. 97.

The interior of the temple teems with people. On the right, a group of males made up of musicians, a Rabbi, and Pharisees, along with a little boy fanning the Rabbi, sits on

Figure 2.5 Hunt, William Holman, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (detail of the left side of painting), oil painting, 1854-55, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Birmingham, England.



the temple floor resting on plush pillows [Figure 2.5]. Most wear white robes with caps or yarmulkes on their heads, while several appear to wear turbans. First in this row stands a little fanboy. He wears a bright yellow tunic with a cap rimmed in green. He looks up at the elderly Rabbi next to him. The Rabbi sitting next to the boy shows signs of blindness.

His eyes white from cataracts, the Rabbi clutches the Torah tightly to his chest. He wears a black and white stole, which draws the viewer to him. Next to a Rabbi sits another much older man. Also, in the white robes, he turns to the blind Rabbi. He appears to describe the scene in front of them. The other elders appear younger from the two by several years to decades. All of them have beards of varying lengths appropriate to their age. Many of these men have objects in their hands, such as boxes or a scroll. They observe the reunion of Jesus and his parents. They display a curiosity on their faces as well as possible admiration for the young Jesus.

The second row of men stands starting behind the blind man. They appear much younger with beardless faces. The smallest, dressed in crimson, looks over at the Rabbi. The young men behind the small boy hold instruments while dressed in green tunics. One holds a small harp while another has a small stringed instrument in his hand. Next to the musicians stands an older man bending down to speak to two of the younger men in the front row. He wears a darker color with a bright rim of yellow and orange on his hat. He urgently speaks to the men in front of him with his hands resting on their shoulders. The last in the row holds a vessel for water and dispenses drinks to the group.

In the back center of the temple stands a small group comprised of an older man wearing white, followed by a man carrying a lamb over his shoulders. A woman draped in blue carrying a child follows the men. The grouping to the right has Joseph standing behind Mary and Jesus. They are in a triangle with Joseph at the top point. He has auburn hair and a beard, appears middle-aged, and dresses in modest brown robes with red in his turban. Jesus stands to the left and in front of Joseph, wearing a vivid blue and white striped tunic with a leather belt. His curly, auburn hair sits at chin length. Mary leans

over, embracing Jesus, wearing a pale blue robe with a white dress underneath. A white veil covers her long auburn hair, with tendrils showing underneath her veil at her legs.

A blind beggar rests against the temple wall with people working in the background just outside the doorway. The blind man wears tattered brown clothes and appears ragged and hungry. He has a wooden crutch lying across his lap. His hand opens to his side as if he is looking for help. The workers in the back appear small in the distance but wear variously colored robes. They work with tools constructing something in the courtyard. The wooden planks behind them stand tall against a building. They appear in a cross formation at first glance, though closer inspection reveals two vertically standing planks and one horizontal as some reinforcement to the building.

At first glance, one might think Hunt painted a religious scene taken from the Bible that he found essential to relay to his viewers. Underneath this superficial layer resides much more meaning in his work. To undertake an analysis of the painting, one must first understand some points of Hunt's current affairs when he created this work. During his Eastern travels, Hunt composes many paintings and sketches, but *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* is unique in that it is one in which Hunt broke some of his own rules for realism in painting. While in Jerusalem, Hunt struggled to find Jewish models to use for his painting. Repeatedly he would get a man to sit as a model; as he drew, the man would stand up and leave, or the model would not make the appointment at all. Hunt wrote about these frustrating events in his memoir *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*.³⁴ After returning to England, Hunt felt he had to find Jewish models to finish his painting. While trying to put together his Jewish temple for

³⁴ Hunt, William Holman. 1905. *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Macmillan. 462.

the painting, Hunt could not settle on using details merely from one architectural tradition. There are Jewish temples and Islamic architecture elements present in the temple he depicts the Holy Family gathered in. Again, breaking his advice to Seddon concerning realism, Hunt finished the structure within the painting after returning to England. Eventually, he settled for using the Islamic architecture of the replicated Alhambra Palace installed at the Crystal Palace in London as the basis for his conception of the Temple.³⁵ The use of Jewish models found in London and such architectural replicas did not dampen the later success of Hunt's work.

Putting all of Hunt's issues aside from creating a more consistently realistic depiction of the temple and the people of Jerusalem, Hunt used his new symbolic language in the painting. Every detail in the painting, including the frame, means something important when looking past the literal aspects of the work. In the manner of early Netherlandish painters such as Jan Van Eyck, Hans Memling, and Robert Campin, Hunt wanted many levels of understanding to exist within one work.³⁶

Hunt used color, animals, scripture, and prophecy to focus on the stages of the life of Christ and the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament of a Savior. *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* repeatedly refers to the life of Christ beyond the scene depicted. Hunt, to be sure, wanted to reinforce the importance of this episode because this was the moment Jesus realized who he was to become and his mission on Earth. The pinnacle moment captures his parents finding their missing son in the temple debating with the Rabbi and Pharisees.³⁷ The sanctity of the moment is reinforced in

³⁵ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, and Timothy Barringer. 2018. *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*. 45.

³⁶ Landow, George P. 1979. *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. 97.

³⁷ Ibid., 101

Hunt's painting by the doves flying into the temple, symbolizing the Holy Spirit flying towards Christ from Heaven. At the same time, construction outside the temple allows the viewer to understand that the scene is unfolding to foreshadow the life of Christ. The scene outside the temple of the men doing construction refers to the cornerstone of the New Law.³⁸ Boards resting on the building across the courtyard show the future of this young Jesus, with the Crucifixion of the adult Jesus cementing his place as the cornerstone. The baby and lamb in the background of the temple reinforce the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The lamb symbolizes the Passover sacrifice, which in Christian art refers to the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus as he becomes the New Testament's lamb.

The two blind men refer to one of the miracles Jesus later performs. The man leaning against the doorway and the Rabbi echo each other. The man outside regains his sight later as part of a miracle while the Rabbi optimistically hopes for himself and the Pharisees to see with a new understanding and thoughtfulness.³⁹ The blind Rabbi represents those unable to let go of the old ways and embrace the new. Therefore, he rejects Jesus as he clutches the Torah, his blindness suggesting his lack of faith in the prophecy. He can also stand for those of other beliefs who also reject Christianity.⁴⁰

Hunt uses color in his symbolism to convey meaning further. Standard color definitions from the Victorian period might give insight to symbolism and allude to Hunt's intentions. Jesus, Mary, and the mother holding the baby in the back of the temple all wear blue. Mary, often shown in blue with a white robe, thereby reveals her purity of

³⁸ Landow, George P. 1979. *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. 97.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

spirit. Due to Jesus' depiction as a youth in the painting, he also wears blue to illustrate his purity. The beggar at the door wearing brown refers to the Earth, humility, and renewal. The Chief Rabbi, in his black and white stole, becomes a combination of meanings. White also refers to purity, while the black stripes stand for sin or death. The double meaning put on the Rabbi shows the duality of the Jewish nature Hunt wants to bring to the viewer. The green of the musicians standing behind the Pharisees represents renewal and refers to the Resurrection.⁴¹

Hunt uses an unlimited arsenal of symbols and iconography in *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, while he also falls back to an Orientalist discourse in his work. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said has described artists, such as Hunt, as presenting a patronizing vision of the Orient (Middle Eastern countries) as part of a larger nineteenth-century European discourse that sought to understand the Orient but in a way that is inextricable from the desire to dominate and control it. Said names several specific nineteenth-century people who contributed to this vision of Imperialistic Britain and France, including the artist Eugène Delacroix and writers John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle.⁴² In turn, this advanced the European ideals of colonizing and controlling the Orient by creating discussion of a preindustrial society that needed Europeans to survive and thrive.⁴³

Some have found ulterior motives in Hunt and his "Oriental-mania," putting him in the role of self-promoter and supposed savior of realism in religious painting. *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* and other works he crafted during his travels gained

⁴¹ "History Of Color And Symbolism English Literature Essay." n.d. Accessed March 2, 2021. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/history-of-color-and-symbolism-english-literature-essay.php>.

⁴² Said, Edward W., and Edward William Said. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books. 9.

⁴³ Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books. 1-6.

him accolades for the realism in his art, which he considered necessary to fulfill the Pre-Raphaelite ideals and those of Ruskin by holding truth to nature. He received applause from British audiences for his accuracy and the realistic approach in his painting. Little did his critics and fans know the ends of procuring his Jewish models and his model for the temple.⁴⁴

Though William Holman Hunt went on his travels holding Imperialistic ideas of the Orient, he also went intending to bring a new realism to religious painting to Britain and beyond. The realism captured would further the religious devotions and understanding of the faithful while looking at his art. Hunt still took on Orientalist themes both in his painting and personal life. His multiple travels to the Orient gave him great struggles and challenges he did not expect, but it still did not dim his love of the “other.” Hunt succeeded in bringing a new kind of symbolism to religious painting and breaking free from the stereotypical symbols of European religious works used for many years. He created what many today would consider an Orientalist persona, knowingly and willingly. Part of it could amount to the innocence of wanting to live the romantic *Arabian Nights* like many of his peers of the nineteenth century while at the same time using the Orient to advance himself as an artist. His letters and memoirs show that his experiences created a conflicted view of British Imperialism and also an enduring interest in the religious struggles of those living in the East.

⁴⁴ Landow, George P. "William Holman Hunt's "Oriental Mania" and His Uffizi Self-portrait." *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1982). 649.

CHAPTER 3

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Pre-Raphaelite and Exoticism

Best known for his paintings of luxurious surroundings with beautiful women, Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted and wrote poetry allowing viewers to see his sense of passion and romance. In 1848 he founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with peers William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais to change the accepted norms of British art advanced by the Royal Academy of Art. At the same time, Rossetti followed in his mother's footsteps, a scholar and teacher, his uncle John Polidori, a writer, and his father, a Dante scholar, by authoring poems and stories on mythological, religious, and classical books. Rossetti loved poetry, especially when it concerned ancient, mythological topics or works by his namesake, Dante Alighieri.

Often, poems or a verse accompanied his paintings with the idea that the viewer would come away with a better understanding and appreciation of his work. For example, *Astarte Syriaca* uses the template of a poem and painting together and positions Rossetti in the discourse of Orientalism as defined by Said and Nochlin.⁴⁵ Through careful examination of Rossetti's work, I will argue that it does indicate a sustained engagement with several Orientalist tropes. A close analysis of the painting and poetry of *Astarte Syriaca* forces one to see and gain a better understanding of how Dante Gabriel Rossetti worked within an Oriental discourse in many of his works.

Rossetti's art does not appear obviously Orientalist when compared to other artists of the time such as Eugène Delacroix, Jean-Léon Gérôme, or fellow Pre-Raphaelite Hunt

⁴⁵ This refers to Edward Said's books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* and Linda Nochlin's essay "The Imaginary Orient".

in their use of Orientalist themes. Rossetti's work does not generally have a realistic setting or photographic quality but; instead seems to capture a fantasy world. Many of his subjects went unnoticed or unrecognized because he often did not display his art in exhibitions or galleries, instead choosing to work privately with clients. However, I will argue that Rossetti did play a significant role in what we have come to understand as Orientalism.

Rossetti's works with their mixtures of poetry and painting became known as "double works" or "two-sided art."⁴⁶ As early as 1848, Rossetti incorporated this painting and poetry combination with *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* [Figure 3.1].⁴⁷ The process

Figure 3.1 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, 1848-49, oil on canvas, Tate Museum, U.K./ArtStor Images



⁴⁶ Golden, Catherine. 1988. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Two-Sided Art." *Victorian Poetry* 26 (4): 395.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 395.

involved completing the painting or drawing first and then writing the poem, which would elaborate on Rossetti's thoughts concerning the theme of the painting.⁴⁸ Throughout his career, the "double works" changed in style as Rossetti grew and changed as an artist and writer. In the beginning and middle of his career, Rossetti's paintings had characters and objects everywhere and specific symbolism he added to convey the painting's narrative. Luckily, Rossetti authored the poem to go with his paintings, which helped the viewer understand the scene, especially if they were not well versed in the painted references. As he matured with his art and poetry in later years, fewer objects and people appeared. The double works guiding the stories emphasized the primary figure(s), and the limitation of objects allowed Rossetti to focus on his symbolism.⁴⁹

Astarte Syriaca [Figure 3.2], painted in 1877, marked the end of Rossetti's Venus obsession, which had begun in 1863 with *Helen of Troy*. In addition, working from the writings of John Lemprière, an eighteenth-century Classical scholar and author of *Bibliotheca Classica*: a classical dictionary and the works of Ovid, the Roman first-century author, Rossetti, fed himself with information concerning the concepts and accouterments of the Goddess of Love and Beauty. For fourteen years, Rossetti experimented with the different concepts of Venus, ranging from the mythology of the Romans and Greeks to the Venus of the Syrians. Through a mixture of painting, sketches, and poetry, the series included *Helen of Troy*, *Venus Verticordia* (the changer of hearts), "Troy Town," *Cassandra*, *Pandora*, "Venus Victrix" (the victorious), and *La Bella Mano*. Though all the forms bear similarities, differences depend on the region where

⁴⁸ "Rossetti Archive Double Works Exhibit." n.d. Accessed December 17, 2020.
<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/racs/doubleworks.rac.html>.

⁴⁹ Golden, Catherine. 1988. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Two-Sided Art." *Victorian Poetry* 26 (4): 395.

they initially originated. Primarily Rossetti focused on the more famous Roman and Greek mythology of Venus and Aphrodite.

Figure 3.2 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *Astarte Syriaca*, 1877, oil on canvas, Manchester Art Gallery, U.K./Bridgeman Images



Rossetti's fascination with Venus does not surprise art historians. She has been a source of fascination for thousands of years to artists, of course. Dating to prehistoric times, Venus or Astarte has existed to represent beauty, love, and the mysteries of propagation.

When asked about Venus, many think of the statue of *Venus de Milo* or Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus*. The image of a beautiful maiden, often nude or barely clothed, with sensuous curves and long flowing hair, portrays the Western world's Venus. She might have small angelic cupids or stand in nature, but her image is understood by most to be about love and beauty. Rossetti's earlier depictions of Venus have long flowing hair, diaphanous clothing, and bare skin. They are at the peak of their worldly beauty and are meant for admiration. The *Astarte Syriaca* presents an entirely different understanding and depiction of Venus compared to his other works.

To understand the symbolism and appearance of Venus that Rossetti used in his painting, one must have some background in the form of Venus he used in this double work. The Astarte Venus originates from the Lady of Byblos, one of the Middle East's best-known goddesses. Her name changes depending on her origin, but she goes by Aphrodite, Demeter, Hathor, Kali, and Venus in various cultures in the region. Astarte is referred to in the Bible as Asherah, whom Solomon worships in the Book of Kings.⁵⁰ In Byblos, some shrines date back to the Neolithic period and gained popularity during the Bronze Age. She has not always existed as the Goddess of Love and Beauty. In the beginning, her power allowed her to create and destroy, and rulers looked to her for help in creating new kingdoms and allowing current kingdoms to grow. Astarte controlled the souls in the heavens and became known as the "Queen of the Stars" in the moon's place, surrounded by the souls of stars.⁵¹ An example of her depiction during the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E. can be seen at the Louvre [Figure 3.3].

⁵⁰ Walker, Barbara G. 1983. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. HarperCollins. 69.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

Figure 3.3 Seleucid, *Statuette of Astarte* , 3rd-2nd century BC, Alabaster, / Louvre, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images



The title of “Queen of the Star” explains symbolism involving the heavens, stars, and the moon in representations of Astarte. It was not until later, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that Astarte gained a reputation with Christians as a deity sent by the devil to lure men to impure acts, an understanding of Venus especially current in the West. Astarte in the East, especially in Syria and Egypt, came to be seen as an ancient Virgin Mary prototype because she is responsible for rebirth and bringing Christ to the world. Her day of celebration was celebrated on December 25, matching the Christian celebration of

Christmas.⁵² Though Western culture has focused on the concepts of Love and Beauty concerning the Goddess, there are still links in Venice and other cities to Venus as the Goddess of the skies and linked to the Virgin Mary.⁵³

These explanations of the origins of Astarte make one question how Rossetti understood the story of Astarte and what his depiction of her would be. Because he had drawn on the concept of Venus in her various forms as Prosperine, Venus Victrix, Venus Verticordia, and Pandora, it was now time to tackle the Eastern idea of Venus. The second verse of the poem Rossetti wrote to incorporate into his massive painting finds itself placed at the bottom of the frame he designed for the work.

The sonnet is short, consisting of two stanzas in iambic pentameter as follows:

Astarte Syriaca (for a picture)

*MYSTERY: lo! betwixt the sun and moon
Astarte of the Syrians: Venus Queen
Ere Aphrodite was. In silver sheen
Her twofold girdle clasps the infinite boon
Of bliss whereof the heaven and earth commune:
And from her neck's inclining flower-stem lean
Love-freighted lips and absolute eyes that wean
The pulse of hearts to the spheres' dominant tune.*

*Torch-bearing, her sweet ministers compel
All thrones of light beyond the sky and sea
The witnesses of Beauty's face to be:
That face, of Love's all-penetrative spell
Amulet, talisman, and oracle, —
Betwixt the sun and moon a mystery.*

First, the poem opens with “Mystery: lo,” a reference to the Book of Revelation 17:5, which comments on the coming of the whore of Babylon.⁵⁴ Many reading the poem

⁵² Walker, Barbara G. 1983. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. HarperCollins. 1043-1044.

⁵³ Ibid., 1043-1044.

⁵⁴ McGann, Jerome G. “Astarte Syriaca (for a Picture).” *Astarte Syriaca (for a Picture) - Collection Introduction*. Accessed December 1, 2020.

might have been shocked to compare Venus to a whore, so the reader must keep progressing. He gives various names for Astarte, mentioning her aliases of Venus and Aphrodite. She finds herself situated between the sun and the moon embracing the sky with her girdle to bring heaven and Earth closer. Rossetti describes her “love freighted lips” and long neck describing his model, Jane Burden Morris. The end of the stanza brings together the different spheres of music in the presence of Astarte.

The second stanza, inscribed on the frame, is shorter by two lines but no less powerful. This second and the last part explains what one sees in the painting. There are two winged women referred to as ministers, holding torches in the painting and located above and behind Astarte; these figures help guide those searching to find Astarte in the heavens. While the last two lines mention that she sits between the moon and sun with the stars and in possession of three articles: the “amulet, talisman, and oracle.” These three items represent objects used as tools in ritualistic services.

After reading the sonnet, one must look carefully at the painting to see all the allusions Rossetti presented. First, the prominent figure is centered. She is tall and ethereally draped in a green dress. The viewer does not see her complete body because her figure is cut off right below the knees. Only one shoulder is draped in the fabric, while from the other, the fabric has fallen around her arm. Her dress is secured underneath her breasts with gold and beaded cord created from “roses and pomegranates” and again around her full hips, which refers to “passion and sexual regeneration.”⁵⁵ The cord creates the idea of a girdle, which Rossetti describes in the poem. Her dark, wavy hair contrasts with her pale, creamy skin. Her full lips are dusky pink and resemble a bow. Her piercing eyes stare

⁵⁵ Sasso, Eleonora. 2019. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Edinburgh University Press. 33.

at the viewer and seem to be judging those who stand before her. Behind her on either side are her winged assistants. Both are in profile facing towards Astarte with their heads up and looking at the sky. They wear green drapery with a torch held closest to Astarte. Both winged assistants are fair-skinned with long, red hair and blue eyes. Immediately, it is apparent that the three women all have the same characteristics of a pronounced nose, full lips, and large eyes. Behind the winged assistants, in the background, are the sun, the moon, and directly over the head of Astarte, the morning star. The sun and the moon work astrologically to represent the male and female or the body and the soul. The morning star over Astarte's head, or the planet Venus, brings renewal of light and the approach of night representing the Goddess Astarte.

Using Jane Burden Morris as his model, he overwhelms the painting with a goddess standing in a green robe, allowing one to view his perceived origins of the Goddess Venus surrounded in mystery and Love. Rossetti combines Eastern and Western mythology in this work to allow viewers to understand the mystery of Astarte as he does. She is the ultimate bearer and creator of Love. The choice of this Venus as the last installment in his Venus obsession becomes an exciting decision because she is depicted, in a sense, as the originating myth of Venus but finds herself in the final piece.

After close looking at both the artwork and poem of *Astarte Syriaca*, we see that Rossetti's placement fits, albeit in an understated way, into an Orientalist discourse. According to Elenora Sasso, in her book *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism*, Rossetti did not deem himself full of "Oriental Mania" or travel to experience the East in person as his peer William Holman Hunt did. Instead, he allowed his imagination to create his vision of the Orient. Having read *Arabian Nights* as a youth and drawing illustrations to

accompany the stories, Rossetti's interest in the Orient grew.⁵⁶ He pictured the East as magical, full of crime and sex. He collected exotic animals, chinoiserie, had jewelry, clothes, and props crafted for his paintings, which incorporated aspects of the East that he admired. With his interest in the East continually growing, Rossetti crafted one of his Orientalist paintings in the *Astarte Syriaca*.

Adding Rossetti and other previously unmentioned artists to the Orientalist discourse becomes crucial to changing how we learn and understand this art. At this time in art history, the focus for many is understanding the difficulties of a colonialist society bent on forming a general population's opinions and misunderstanding societies different from their own. Bringing artists viewed merely as romantic, sensual, or mysterious into the discourse of Orientalism can help broaden people's views of the eras of these artists. It takes an artist out of the bubble we have placed them in and puts them into the society they lived. This popping of the bubble allows the viewer or researcher to better understand the context of the work of art and realize the artist experiences a life that functions beyond their art. Rossetti loved to learn and read; he was involved in politics, building his brand and reputation. These are all aspects put to the side because of how many understand his work. Instead, many view Rossetti as the wild, uncontrollable oversexed man who was all about his salacious behavior. Many articles and books explain this portion of his life. It reads like the current tabloids when they write about a celebrity. The current offerings about Rossetti highlight his infidelity to Elizabeth Siddal, his drinking, his search for the next "stunner," and his affair with William Morris's wife, Jane Burden Morris.

⁵⁶ Sasso, Eleonora. 2019. *The Pre-Raphaelites and Orientalism: Language and Cognition in Remediations of the East*. Edinburgh University Press. 33.

All the hype concerning his life does the beautiful paintings and poems he created a considerable disservice because further analysis ends there; instead, the focus stays on the alluring women surrounded by beautiful things and poetry speaking to their beauty. His obsessions with topics such as Venus show how much time he put into his work. Rossetti is intentional in the work he creates and shares. He wanted to place his models in roles he felt were fit for them. Jane Burden Morris, Elizabeth Siddal, Alexia Wilding, and others all fit specific roles he saw in his mind and placed into stories of mythology and romance. Taking this context of the whole man applies not only to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work but to all artists.

Returning to the definitions of Orientalism created by Edward Said and Linda Nochlin allows a more contextual understanding of the artist and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. This understanding of how Rossetti understood the East and how he later applied it to his works allows us to better understand the man behind the romantic myth. Using this same interpretive approach to other artists of his time will bring forth other artists who have not been traditionally understood as Orientalists and will allow us to gain further insight into their work. Although this discourse does not cover all artists from the nineteenth century, it offers a meaningful way to widen our gaze and give a second look to artists who previously had been pigeonholed psychobiographically as merely irreverent, frivolous, or wild. The widening of our views of understanding artists like Rossetti will give us a more precise awareness of the nineteenth century and our own time.

CHAPTER 4

William Morris: A Pre-Raphaelite and Textiles

William Morris, in 1883, wrote to Andreas Scheu and summed up his “very uneventful life” through a quick story about his childhood and adulthood to that point.⁵⁷ How he understood his life as uneventful would astound anyone who reads about him. Morris was interested in the medieval as a young child, dressing up in a homemade suit of armor. He originally went to Oxford to become a clergyman but figured out this was not the occupation he wanted to hold for his entire life. As he tried out different ideas, he took a position as an intern in architecture because of his interest in architecture, especially older Gothic buildings. With his school friend, Edward Burne Jones, he got involved with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Oxford Union project. The painting project set him on the path finally of becoming an artist. Morris enjoyed learning and exploring different artistic concepts, which allowed him to be a poet, author, textile designer, involved in politics and restoration of buildings, and considered by many as the Arts and Crafts movement’s father. He had far from an uneventful life as he described it.

William Morris explored the tapestry and fabric work from around the world for his inspirations. He then learned from other cultures and created new designs incorporating plants and flowers common to Britain. The popularity of the Great Exhibition in 1851 and previous travels to Italy in 1861 exposed Morris to the arabesques, birds, and colors of the East. The Ardabil Carpet [Figure 4.1] was acquired by the Victoria & Albert Museum in March of 1893 at Morris’s reference.

⁵⁷ Morris, William. 1988. *William Morris by Himself: Designs and Writings*. By Himself Series. London, England: Little, Brown. 15-17.

Figure 4.1 Persian School, *Ardabil Carpet* made for the mosque at Ardabil, Iran, c. 1530, textile, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK/Bridgeman Images



William Morris felt this was a superb example of Persian artistry and should be protected for generations to learn from for years to come.⁵⁸ Exploring Persian and Turkish carpets and textiles, Morris incorporated their color choices and techniques into his works, as seen in the design of *Peacock and Dragon*.⁵⁹

Created in 1878, *Peacock and Dragon* [Figure 4.2] use analogous colors, creating a gradient or ripple effect in the fabric. The most common version consists of yellow, green, and blues, which repeat as the material progresses downwards. The colors appear to melt into one another as the patterns intertwine in the fabric. The wool fabric creates a luxurious and rich material that shows off the colors. The design is large and emerges in approximately one square meter of space.⁴ *Peacock and Dragon* became one of Morris's favorite designs because of the large scale creating a Medieval appearance to the fabric. It

⁵⁸ "The Ardabil Carpet." n.d. Accessed February 21, 2021. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-ardabil-carpet/>.

⁵⁹ Parry, Linda. 1988. *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*. Thames and Hudson. 31.

is thought that the finished size of the design compared to other designs reminds Morris of a more miniature-sized medieval tapestry.

Figure 4.2 Morris, William, *Peacock and Dragon*, 1878, woven wool / Cleveland Museum of Art/Bridgeman Images



Using other patterns from the period *Peacock and Dragon* was designed, there is a definite difference. For example, both *Strawberry Thief* [Figure 4.3] and *Carnation* measure approximately .6-meter x .8 meter while *Peacock and Dragon* measures 2-meter

x 1.4 meters.⁶⁰ The *Peacock and Dragon* pattern moves vertically with a repeating pattern of foliage winding around two dragons facing one another while they are in descending flight. Below the dragons are two peacocks standing neck to neck with their

Figure 4.3 Morris, William, *Strawberry Thief*, 1883, block printed cotton, Bridgeman Images



heads in the air. The dragon and peacock heads alternate within the same space closing the gap between them. Between the animals are vines and leaves filling the open areas. Though the pairing of the animals is a reference to medieval Italian works, Morris also incorporates the Islamic influence of intertwining plants and animals with his color choices.

The incorporation of peacocks into the design found inspiration in Italian art but was also rooted in the East's earlier traditions. The peacock or Bird of Paradise appears in many stories originating from the mythology of Ancient Rome, Egypt, and throughout the East.⁶¹ The stories followed different patterns, but the "eyes" of the colorful tail feather were at the roots. The peacock can be a sign of luck and fortune in some societies,

⁶⁰ Victoria and Albert Museum, and Linda Parry. 1993. *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection: British Textiles from 1850 to 1900*. Victoria & Albert Museum. 24.

⁶¹ Walker, Barbara G. 1983. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. HarperCollins. 778-779

while others are wary of the bird. In the East, the bird foretells a message of hope and good fortune compared to the West's doves.⁶² Morris choosing the peacock for this fabric design is a thought-provoking choice. Though he had seen peacocks during his travels to Venice in St. Mark's, he also was influenced by them while at the Victoria and Albert Museum looking at fourteenth-century Sicilian fabrics.⁶³ The depictions of peacocks are usually beautiful, graceful birds with long plumes of colorful feathers. According to Imogene Hart, Morris strayed away from the typical depiction of peacocks. She feels that Morris's birds "emphasize the oddness and clumsiness of creatures usually endowed with grace and elegance, particularly by Morris's contemporaries."⁶⁴ These peacocks are depicted with long, splayed legs and crane their necks and hold their beaks open in a fearsome position. When paired with the dragon in this textile, one wonders what the peacock and dragon combination means.

The other animal depicted in this textile is the dragon. However, this does not look like a typical dragon, and in fact, Linda Parry has suggested that it bears some resemblance to a phoenix.⁶⁵ If it is one, this dragon has an angry countenance as it swoops down the fabric facing its counterpart. The serpentine dragon bears a plume of feathers at the head, and the top of the body develops wings and a feathered appearance midway down, leading down to a long plume of feathers for a tail. This type of detail matches some Persian imagery of the Phoenix [Figure 4.4].

⁶² Walker, Barbara G. 1983. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. HarperCollins. 778-779.

⁶³ Byatt, A. S. 2016. *Peacock & Vine: On William Morris and Mariano Fortuny*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. 151.

⁶⁴ Hart, Imogen. 2012. "The Designs of William Morris." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, 211–22. Cambridge University Press. 216.

⁶⁵ Parry, Linda. 1995. *William Morris Textiles*. Farmington Hills, MI: Gramercy Books. 65.

In Eastern cultures, the bird represents the Phoenician god Phoenix. The bird rises to the Morning Star after his death and rebirth in a fire.⁶⁶ The idea of this dragon representing a phoenix goes along with Morris's use of birds in his designs and can bear deeper meaning on a cultural level.

Figure 4.4 Illustration from Zakarīyā ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, 'Ajā'ib al-makhlo, c. 1220, Manuscript page, Bridgeman Images



Another key feature to take into consideration when viewing this textile involves the choices of colors and style. Morris, inspired by the quality and beauty of the materials

⁶⁶ Walker, Barbara G. 1983. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. HarperCollins. 798

of the East, created several designs he felt were an homage to the East. Over a decade, Morris designed *Peacock and Dragon* (1878), *Flower Garden* (1879), and *Granada* (1884) that all showed his interest in Islamic prints.⁶⁷ Keeping the focus on *Peacock and Dragon* and the specific traits it offers, one sees the use of colors, blues, and greens, often seen in the tile work of Islamic mosques and pottery. In addition to the colors chosen, Morris incorporated arabesque lines using the vines and plants' interweaving in the style of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Persian carpets. The peacock and dragon become a part of the interlinking of elements, with the colors changing like water flowing. Though Morris had not seen the *Ardabil* carpet yet, one can see how the Safavid carpet makers' influences might have impressed him.⁶⁸ One reference made towards Persian artistry is in a letter to Thomas Wardle on April 13, 1877. Morris makes mention of "a piece of ancient Persian time of Shah Abbas (our Elizabeth's time) that fairly threw me on my back: I had no idea that such wonders could be done in carpets."⁶⁹

This pattern is part of his second period of design. Peter Floud has grouped seventy-three of Morris's designs dating from 1872-1896, which make up four different periods in his work.⁷⁰ Each period shows the progression of Morris's designs and shares varying elements within the same period. The first period included twelve patterns and textile designs dating from 1872-1876. These designs showed an early naturalistic style.⁷¹ The second period covers designs from 1876-1883, with this period the most prolific

⁶⁷ Bancroft, S. "Livable Exoticism: William Morris and Islamic Art." (2013). 44-47.

⁶⁸ This carpet was not viewed by Morris until 1892 when it went for sale to a Manchester carpet company.

"The Ardabil Carpet." n.d. Accessed February 21, 2021. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-ardabil-carpet/>.

⁶⁹ Morris, William. 1984. *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Vol. I: 1848-1880*. Princeton University Press. 365.

⁷⁰ Floud, Peter. 1959. *Dating Morris Patterns*. Architectural Press Limited. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid., 15.

period of the four, with eleven wallpaper and twenty-two chintz designs.⁷² The third period contained ten wallpaper and only seven chintz patterns ranging from the dates of 1883-1890. During this period, Morris crept away from his naturalistic tendencies and focused more on conventional motifs.⁷³ The fourth and final period was 1890-1896. Ten wallpapers and one chintz were designed during this period, and Morris returned to less rigid and flowing structures.⁷⁴

The *Peacock and Dragon* design falls into the second design period and easily stands out compared to other patterns. During this prolific period, few of the patterns were suitable for woven designs instead of most fitting as block prints.⁷⁵ The patterns have a formalism not seen in the first period with Morris integrating symbols he had learned from his study of historical textiles. Instead of focusing on a specific plant or flower in the design, the plants had become more generalized to fit into every blank space. The use of the foliage allowed the patterns to have an emphasized framework not seen previously. This group of designs also followed a vertical repeating pattern versus a focus on the horizontal.⁷⁶

William Morris's decisions in the depictions of animals, colors, and design show how he fits into the Orientalist discourse, but he also became involved in politics in 1876. There was talk in England concerning how England should involve itself in the conflicts between Turkey and Russia. Though he had considered himself Liberal before this time, Morris was learning and expanding how he felt England should place herself into world

⁷² Floud, Peter. 1959. *Dating Morris Patterns*. Architectural Press Limited. 18.

⁷³ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁵ Block printing concerned taking a wooden block with the image in relief and stamping the fabric. Each color would have its own block. Victoria and Albert Museum, and Linda Parry. 1993. *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection: British Textiles from 1850 to 1900*. Victoria & Albert Museum. 139.

⁷⁶ Floud, Peter. 1959. *Dating Morris Patterns*. Architectural Press Limited. 18.

politics. His two political causes became the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Eastern Question Association in the late 1870s.⁷⁷ The Eastern Question Association gave him a space with like-minded men to examine his beliefs about what was transpiring in the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire was falling, and Russia, along with other powers, wanted control of the region. The East's battles between the Turks and the Russians had collapsed a government, and Christians living in the region were being massacred. The meetings convened in 1876 with the members meeting to discuss their opinions, watch and examine how events were unfolding, and promulgate information to the public.⁷⁸

Unlike other artists considered Orientalist, Morris does not use explicit Orientalist tropes like Hunt or focus on exotic imagery like Rossetti. Instead, Morris takes the path of inspiration and admiration of the art of the East in his works. He worked from a different perspective in art from Hunt and Rossetti. Instead of a focus on narrative paintings, his focus lay on textiles and objects for the home. Because he was working in different media (instead of a canvas), his exploration of the Middle East takes a different path. As his career progressed, he was widely known for his knowledge concerning textiles of different cultures and periods. Morris felt artists should be inspired by the past and take what they have learned to create something new.⁷⁹ Taking all of this into consideration and Morris's political leanings, one can see how he comes from a different side of the discourse. Although Morris creates additional questions with his work, it can

⁷⁷ Morris, William. 1996. *William Morris on Art and Design*. Sheffield Academic. 154.

⁷⁸ Morris, William. 1984. *The Collected Letters of William Morris: 1848-1880*. Princeton University Press. 326.

⁷⁹ William Morris Gallery. n.d. "[No Title]." Accessed February 21, 2021. <https://www.wmgallery.org.uk/collection/themes/william-morris/object/peacock-and-dragon-f26e-designed-1878>.

be appreciated that he wanted to come from a side of admiration and bring old traditions to new contexts incorporating into his works the art of cultures worldwide.

CHAPTER 5

Synthesis of Work

Each of these artists merges into the Orientalist discourse in different ways, and each can bring different interpretations and arguments of how they fit into the discussion. William Holman Hunt, as mentioned earlier, seizes the title Orientalist most out of this group. He works within not only the criteria set by Edward Said but also Linda Nochlin. He followed earlier British artists such as John Frederick Lewis, Edward Lear, David Wilkie, who had traveled before him to the Middle East.⁷⁹ In Hunt's exacting work, there becomes a focus on the gaze and the stopping of time. Dante Gabriel Rossetti did not travel to the East but took the route of artists such as Delacroix, Gerome, and others to depict the women in gauzy clothing with European features. He focuses on the male gaze looking at the women, but instead of a harem, the women are depicted in a magical setting. William Morris comes into the argument from a less obvious route. Morris brings into the conversation appropriation versus inspiration by bringing Eastern and medieval Italian elements into his designs, connecting them to the past.

One can argue that these artists' intentions were not to be harmful to Eastern people but created through the knowledge of their time. Hunt wanted to bring reality to his work that he felt others, including himself was lacking. Rossetti had gone through the different versions of Venus and had finally gotten to the origin of the story. Morris wanted to bring old traditions to the British because he felt Eastern textiles exhibited high quality and long-lasting beauty. With this knowledge, Rossetti sticks out as the most harmful of the three. He has taken an entity Astarte and recreated her to fit his sensual

needs though it becomes difficult to pin this on his obsession with Jane Morris or his lack of first-hand knowledge of the East.

Much more research is needed to fully understand how these men thought and understood the world around them and how it affected their art. They wrote a considerable amount through letters to their family, friends, and colleagues, kept copious notes, journals, and wrote published works. Although they put down many of their thoughts into words, what did they not include in their writing? At a recent lecture concerning William Morris's Kelmscott Press, William S. Peterson mentioned the amount of writing Morris did concerning various projects. Peterson explained there are many questions still left unanswered and created the challenge to the historian of having to figure out what was not written by Morris.⁸⁰ Each of the artists creates this paradox into their works. Hunt wrote his memories of the brotherhood fifty years after some of the events. How accurate are the memories, and how much does Hunt impact the story with biases developed over the years? Rossetti brings the issue of his mental health to the forefront of this conversation. His health had been declining due to mental breakdowns and his addiction to chloral hydrate. His contact with the Morris's had ended in 1874 when he left Kelmscott House for good.

The project aims to create a different discussion of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and look at them under a different lens. Opening this discussion has led to many still unanswered questions but hopefully gave new insight into these artists' that can be built upon by myself and others. There is still much work to be done concerning the three mentioned in this paper and their peers.

⁸⁰ Peterson, Michael S. 2021. "The Kelmscott Press." Presented at the The Kelmscott Press Books in a Nineteenth Century Context, March 20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k8a2uJ48yI>.

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